



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
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FROM: Joseph Thiel, Interim Deputy Commissioner, Academic, Research and Student Affairs

TO: Montana Board of Regents

OCHE Analysis and Recommendation RE: Artificial Intelligence Centers and Institutes

The board will consider on its November 2025 agenda two campus Request to Plan proposals for centers/institutes related to artificial intelligence.

- Montana State University – Institute on Artificial Intelligence
- University of Montana – Center for Human-Centered AI

OCHE recommends the board approve both requests within a framework for coordination and facilitation by OCHE as the centers/institutes develop and after they launch.

Research centers and institutes are organized to facilitate research, educational programming, and community outreach and services, and generally have support from grants to fund administrative staff and activities. OCHE has promulgated definitions and guidance related to expectations for MUS Centers and Institutes in its Academic Affairs Handbook (Appendix B).

Both MSU and UM have substantial and ongoing research, educational, and outreach initiatives related to artificial intelligence, with signs that these activities will only increase and will warrant the development of Centers or Institutes as organizing entities to support and align the variety of grants, faculty, staff and projects related to AI. Centers/Institutes at each location are appropriate because they leverage each university's distinct strengths, partnerships, and areas of expertise, and they provide greater flexibility to adapt to a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

While there will be substantial cause for these centers/institutes to coordinate and collaborate, ***OCHE does not recommend establishing a single overarching or MUS-wide institute at this time.*** Past experience with such statewide institute structures is that they overcomplicate the faculty level collaborations and campus-level funding mechanisms that help sustain and grow centers/institutes.

Instead, OCHE recommends close coordination and periodic OCHE oversight as the centers/institutes develop and after they launch on key areas of statewide need. In particular:

- Goals for the MUS to support the AI transition contained in Governor Greg Gianforte's 406 Montana Jobs executive order.
- The provision of AI related services and supports for affiliate institutions.
- Future legislative policy or funding advocacy.

In the near-term, coordination will occur through review and feedback by the MUS AI Task Force. Long-term, coordination will be facilitated by the ARSA deputy commissioner or other such OCHE staff as the Commissioner may designate. Each center or institute will remain under the governance, administrative oversight and financial management of its respective university, consistent with MUS policy for campus-based research centers. OCHE's coordinating role will focus on facilitating communication, statewide alignment, and associated statewide funding requests to the Montana legislature or federal granting agencies, not day-to-day operations.